

Seattle's Waterfront: Making a Great New Place

Seattle has an unprecedented opportunity to rethink its central waterfront. Planning for the new waterfront is happening now!

There is great potential to reconnect the city to its waterfront and make it the preeminent gateway to the region. The City of Seattle is working with numerous stakeholders to:

- enhance the waterfront's urban vitality and realize its enormous economic potential
- restore portions of the natural shoreline environment and retain the waterfront's cultural roots
- strengthen the regional transportation corridor and hub with diverse mobility choices
- celebrate our Northwest and maritime heritage
- renew a sense of place and create a vital and active waterfront for all

The project has captured Seattle's imagination and generated many creative ideas. For the past three years hundreds of people in the community, together with City staff and other agencies, have been envisioning the new waterfront. With catalyst projects including the replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, the redevelopment of Colman Dock, improvements planned for the Seattle Aquarium and Piers 62/63, and construction of the Olympic Sculpture Park, the transformation of the waterfront is already underway. The area demands a coherent framework that links together all the new initiatives and sets a new direction for the future that will benefit everyone who lives, works and plays along the water's edge. The Waterfront Concept Plan offers just that. It sets out a development program that can be realized over time, relying on partnerships for funding and future cooperative management.

This exhibit contemplates the next century and a great, new role for the central waterfront as the centerpiece of downtown Seattle and the Puget Sound region.

Waterfront History



Princess Angeline, c. 1890



Canoes at Seattle Waterfront, c. 1892
photos by Boyd & Braas (UW Libraries Digital Collections)

For Centuries Salish natives (the Duwamish and Suquamish tribes) fished, gathered and hunted along the abundant shoreline that was to become Seattle's waterfront.

Pioneer City 1852-1880

1852 Pioneers settled by the Duwamish Indians near the present intersection of 1st Avenue and Yesler Street.

1870s Railroads linked the waterfront to the region's coal mines.

Colman Dock
(Museum of History and Industry, Seattle)



Waterfront, vicinity Pike Street, c. 1865
(UW Libraries Digital Collection)

Waterfront Boom 1880-1900

1889 Seattle Great Fire destroyed most of the downtown, including the waterfront. The harbor facilities were quickly rebuilt.

1897 Gold was discovered in Alaska and the Klondike Gold Rush established Seattle as the gateway to Alaska. Piers were rebuilt at an angle to accommodate larger ships and shipbuilding became a major industry.

Maturing Waterfront 1900-1930

1909-1917 Shoreline became fixed with the construction of the seawall.

1915 Port of Seattle developed Seattle's first waterfront park on the roof of the Bell Street Terminal. It included a solarium, salt water pool and a children's play area.

Decline and Transition 1930-1970

1930s The golden age of the Mosquito Fleet ended; private automobile ferries replaced most of the steamboat fleet, requiring a complete reconstruction of Colman Dock.

1951 Washington State Ferries acquired the ferry system, followed by the purchase of Colman Dock in 1952.

1953 First link of the Alaskan Way Viaduct opened.



Waterfront with the Alaskan Way Viaduct, circa 1967
(UW Libraries Digital Collections)

Public Investment and Redevelopment 1970-1990

1970s Widespread introduction of containerization shifted most port activity to the Duwamish River mouth.

1970s Piers 60 and 61, built between the World Wars, were demolished; Piers 56, 57 and 70 were privately redeveloped for tourism.

1976 The City created Myrtle Edwards Park linking the northern end of the central waterfront with Elliott Bay Park. The park was named in honor of her vision to develop public open spaces during her leadership in the Seattle City Council.

1977 Piers 59 and 60 were redeveloped to house the Seattle Aquarium.

1982 The waterfront streetcar began operating along Alaskan Way, connecting the waterfront with the Pike Place Market.

1985 Market Park was renamed Victor Steinbrueck Park to commemorate his contributions to Seattle and to the restoration of Pike Place Market.

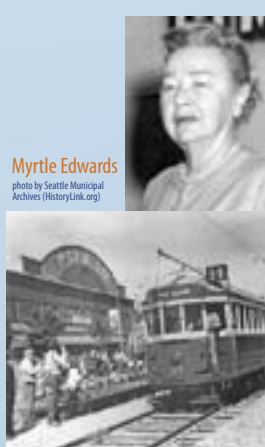


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City of Seattle, Greg Nickels, Mayor

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The Waterfront Streetcar's inaugural journey, 1982
photo by F. Shaw (HistoryLink.org)



Myrtle Edwards
photo by Seattle Municipal Archives (HistoryLink.org)



Pike Place Market after restorations